

ASPECTS IN THE *Mišne Tora*

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the distinction between the perfective and the imperfective aspects in the Maimonidean verbal system. The Maimonidean system derives from mishnaic Hebrew and, as far as the aspects are concerned, it displays far more rigorous differentiation than the earlier strata of the language. The developments leading to this situation include broadened use of the participle in the finite tenses for the imperfective aspect and the modal use of the participle for the perfective aspect.

1.0 In the Introduction to his *Sefer Hamitzvot* Maimonides wrote that he intended composing his code *biluḡat almišnā* 'in mishnaic Hebrew', rather than *bilisān kutub attanzil* 'in biblical Hebrew' or *biluḡat attalmūd* 'in talmudic Aramaic'.¹ It is well known that the tense system of mishnaic Hebrew differs markedly from the tense system of biblical Hebrew. Many biblical Hebrew verb forms, such as the long imperfect, the short imperfect, the absolute infinitive, and forms with the consecutive *wāw*, are either rare or nonexistent in mishnaic Hebrew. On the other hand, mishnaic Hebrew uses certain forms, such as *hyh* + participle and *'tyd* + infinitive, which are at least uncommon in biblical Hebrew.

1.1 Although the linguistic character of the *Mišne Tora* is closer to mishnaic Hebrew than to either biblical Hebrew or talmudic Aramaic, Maimonidean Hebrew grammar does differ significantly from the mishnaic model.² Changes in the use of the tenses and the increased importance

1. Kafih (1971, p. 2). Maimonides preferred the mishnaic Hebrew model *kai yusahhil dālika 'ala 'akḥar 'annās* 'so that it would be easy for most people'. Although much attention has been devoted to lexical and other stylistic features of Maimonidean Hebrew, relatively few studies of his grammar have appeared (cf. Dienstag 1969, p. 7, note 29).

2. This linguistic characterization of the *Mišne Tora* is based on the Bodleian (Oxford) manuscript (Neubauer no. 577), the Rome edition (prior to 1480), the Moses ben Shealtiel edition (Spain or Portugal, prior to 1497), and the Constantinople edition (1509). All the examples cited in this article were compared with photocopies of these sources. Abbreviations for parts of the *Mišne Tora* are as follows: *Yās.* = *yāsode hattora*, *TT* = *talmud tora*, *AZ* = *'aboda zara*, and *Tš.* = *tšuba*.

of the verbal aspects are two of the most interesting developments exhibited in Maimonidean Hebrew.

1.2 The basic structure of the mishnaic Hebrew tense system can be summarized as follows:³

*p'l*⁴=past or preterite

hyh+participle=repeated or usual action in the past or future

participle=present or future

'*tyd*+infinitive=future (used when clearcut indication of the future is required)

*yp'wl*⁵=modus (used for jussive, subjunctive, etc.)

2.0 Maimonides uses all these mishnaic forms in the *Mišne Tora*. He distinguishes between the use of *p'l* and *hyh*+participle in a way very similar to mishnaic Hebrew; *p'l* is the perfective form and *hyh*+participle is the imperfective form for the past tense. Consider for example, these *p'l* forms used in the Introduction:

כל התורה כתבה משה.	Moses wrote the whole Torah.
ודוד קיבל משמואל ובית דינו.	And David received (it) from Samuel and his court.
הוא קיבץ כל השמועות.	He assembled all the traditions.
והגיעו לקצוות.	And they reached remote areas.

2.1 In general the distinction between the aspects requires that the perfective be used when referring to a complete action. For example, *qybš* 'he assembled' is viewed as a single, complete action; even though the assembling extended over a period of time, he finished assembling at some point in the past.

Thus Maimonides can use the *p'l* form in citing the views of a past authority, since the statements cited were completed in the past:

רמז הכתוב ואמר. The verse implied and said. (*Yas.* 1:10)

3. E. Y. Kutscher's last formulations regarding the mishnaic tense system are in Kutscher, 1972, col. 1600, and Kutscher, 1974, p. 42. The most recent refinement of Kutscher's formulation is by Sharvit, 1980.

4. I. e. the suffix conjugation of each *binyan*.

5. I. e. the prefix conjugation of each *binyan*. The development *yip'al*>*yip'ol* began in the mishnaic period (cf. Kutscher, 1974, p. 39) and was continued and broadened by Maimonides. For example, the following verbs have *yip'al* forms in biblical Hebrew, but are *yip'ol* in Maimonidean Hebrew: *yṛḥwš* 'wash' in *De'ot* 4:16, *yḵ'ws* 'get angry' in *TT* 4:4, and *yṇhwg* 'act' in *TT* 7:4. In view of this development *yp'wl* is the appropriate label for the prefix conjugation in Maimonidean Hebrew.

- אמרו חכמים. The sages said. (*TT* 3:2)
 צו חכמים. The sages commanded. (*De'ot* 2:4)

In the expression מפי השמועה למדו (Positive Commandment 86) the verb may be *lamədu* 'they learned' or *limmədu* 'they taught'. Since 'they taught' would be iterative or habitual rather than perfective in this context, it is excluded as a possibility. 'They learned,' on the other hand, makes sense in terms of its perfective aspect and is therefore the correct reading.

2.2 Imperfective use of *hyh* + participle is also common:

- וחסידים ראשונים היו The pious men of old used to incline
 מטין דעות שלהם. their dispositions. (*De'ot* 1:5)
 ואעפ"כ היו עוסקין בתורה. Nonetheless they engaged in the
 study of Torah. (*TT* 1:9)
 ובראשונה היה הרב יושב. Formerly the teacher used to sit.
 (*TT* 4:2)

These examples refer to the duration of the action, rather than to its completeness. Therefore *hyw 'wsqyn* means rather that they studied over a period of time, but does not emphasize the fact that they ended their study.

2.3 In addition to *hyh* + participle, Maimonides often uses the participle without *hyh* for imperfective forms in the past tense. Although this usage is rare in mishnaic Hebrew, it is common in late rabbinic Hebrew (cf. Sokoloff, 1969, p. 144). The following examples are drawn from the Introduction to the *Mišne Tora*:

- והוא מלמד ע"פ ברבים. And he taught orally in public.
 אין אדם מכיר אותה לשון. Nobody was familiar with that
 language.
 ושאלות רבות שואלין אנשי
 כל עיר ועיר. The people in each city asked
 many questions.

3.0 For the imperfective forms of the present tense, Maimonides often uses the participle.

- ובן אתה מוצא בכל מקום And so you find everywhere that
 שהתלמוד קודם למעשה study precedes practice because
 מפני שהתל' מביא לידי study leads to practice. (*TT* 1:3)
 מעשה.

אין דברי תורה מתקיימין במי שמרפא עצמו ולא באלו שלומדין מתוך ערון.	The words of the Torah are not pre- served in one who is lazy, nor in those who study in luxury. (<i>TT</i> 3:12)
אי זה הוא חולק על רבו זה שקובע לו מדרש ויושב ודורש ומלמד.	Who disputes his teacher? He who maintains a school, sits, discours- es, and teaches. (<i>TT</i> 5:2)

3.1 Unlike mishnaic Hebrew, Maimonides often uses the *yp'wl* form for the present tense. This usage is common for both aspects.

ובמה יפרדו הצורות זו מזו.	How are the forms different from each other? (<i>Yas.</i> 2:5)
אינו בא למוכיח ... לפיכך יעמוד בחטאתיו.	He does not go to an admonitor ... therefore he persists in his sins. (<i>Tas.</i> 4:3)
אין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר לו.	No one forces him or orders him. (<i>Tas.</i> 5:3)
לא יתבזו ולא יגלו ראשן.	They do not demean themselves and they do not uncover their heads. (<i>De'ot</i> 5:6)
כשיעמוד מלך רשע כנבוכדנאצר וחביריו ויגזור שמו על ישראל.	When a wicked king arises like N. and his confederates and decrees religious persecution against Israel. (<i>Yas.</i> 5:3)
אבל החכמים ובעלי דעה ידעו שכל הדברים האלו ...	But the wise and intelligent know that all these things ... (<i>Tas.</i> 7:10)

4.0 For the future tense Maimonides uses (1) the *yp'wl* form, (2) *yhyh* + participle, or (3) a paraphrastic infinitive construction. No form of the future is very frequent in the *Mišne Tora*.

4.1 Use of the *yp'wl* form for the future tense is restricted to the perfective aspect:

ואחלק ההלכות לפרקים.	I shall divide the <i>halakot</i> into chapters. (Introduction)
שכר הצדיקים הוא שיוזכו לנועם זה.	The reward of the righteous is that they will attain this bliss. (<i>Tas.</i> 8:1)
לפי שבאותן הימים תרבה הדיעה.	For in those days knowledge will increase. (<i>Tas.</i> 9:2)

4.2 The *yhyh* + participle construction is used for the imperfective aspect:

יהיה חבור זה מקבץ לתושבע"פ כולה.	This compendium will contain all the Oral Law. (Introduction)
ת"ח לא יהא צועק וצוח בשעת דבורו.	A scholar will not shout or scream when speaking. (<i>De'ot</i> 5:7)
היאך יהיה האדם עושה כל מה שיחפוץ.	How will one do all he wants? (<i>Taš.</i> 5:4)

4.3 Paraphrastic constructions occur with either *'tyd* or *swp*:

ועתיד אתה ליתן את הדין.	But you will render account. (<i>Taš.</i> 5:4)
הודיעו שסוף זרעו להשתעבד.	He informed him that his descendants will be enslaved. (<i>Taš.</i> 6:5)
סוף ישראל לעשות תשובה.	Israel will repent. (<i>Taš.</i> 7:5)

5.0 For the modus Maimonides uses (1) the *yp'wl* form or (2) the participle.

5.1 The imperfective aspect has *yp'wl* in modal constructions:

ישב במקומו או יטה על שמאלו.	One should sit or incline on the left side. (<i>De'ot</i> 4:3)
ושליש יבין וישכיל.	And during a third he should ponder and deliberate. (<i>TT</i> 1:11)
מהו המנהג שינהג המנודה.	How should a person under ban conduct himself? (<i>TT</i> 7:4)

5.2 The perfective aspect has the participle in modal constructions:

קוצץ את מקום השם וגזגזו.	One should cut off the part with the Name and put it away. (<i>Yas.</i> 6:6)
אוכל בתחילה בשר העוף.	He should eat the poultry first. (<i>De'ot</i> 4:7)
מכניסין את התנוקות להתלמד בבן שש.	The children are to be admitted to study at about six years of age. (<i>TT</i> 2:2)

6.0 The examples cited above indicate that Maimonides' choice of forms in the various tenses depends on the semantic distinction between the perfective and the imperfective aspects. In the past tense Maimonides uses *p'l* for the perfective aspects and the participle with or without *hyh* for the imperfective aspects. In the present tense *yp'wl* is acceptable for both the perfective and imperfective aspects, although the use of the participle is limited to the imperfective aspect. In the future tense the perfective aspect has the *yp'wl* form, as it does in the present, and the imperfective aspect is formed by *yhyh* + participle. The participle is the modal form for the perfective aspect and *yp'wl* is the modal form for the imperfective aspect.

6.1 The following chart summarizes the Maimonidean tense system:

	<i>Perfective</i>	<i>Imperfective</i>
Past	<i>p'l</i>	(<i>hyh</i> +) participle
Present }	<i>yp'wl</i>	<i>yp'wl</i> or participle
Future }		<i>yhyh</i> + participle
Modus	participle	<i>yp'wl</i>

6.2 There two interesting oppositions in this system. One is an opposition of tenses; the other is an opposition of aspects. The opposition with respect to tense distinguishes past from non-past. In the perfective aspect the past tense is represented by *p'l* and the non-past is represented by *yp'wl*, which generally refers to future time.

6.3 Thus in 'they do not uncover (*yg/w*) their heads' (*De'ot* 5:6; see 3.1 above) and in 'they attain (*yzkw*) this bliss' (*Taš.* 8:1; see 4.0 above) the *yp'wl* form represents the more general, or unmarked, member of the past/non-past opposition. Being unmarked with respect to tense, *yp'wl* derives its specific sense as a result of its opposition to the positively marked past tense represented by *p'l*.

6.4 In the imperfective aspect the participle can refer either to the past or the present. Being the less specific form, the participle clearly represents the unmarked member of the past/non-past opposition. When positive reference to the past tense is desired, *hyh* can be used as a marker. (In the rare cases when Maimonides requires specific reference to the imperfective future, *yhyh* or some other paraphrasis can be used, leading to an even more marked construction.)

6.5 The perfective aspect is the unmarked member of the perfective/imperfective opposition. This is clear from the use of *yp'wl*, which is acceptable for both the perfective and the imperfective forms of the non-past. In order to mark the perfective non-past, Maimonides uses the participle.

6.6 This leads to the conclusion that the form *hyh* + participle (imperfective past) is doubly marked and the form *yp'wl* (perfective non-past) is doubly unmarked in terms of the tense and aspect oppositions. Further unmarked uses of *yp'wl* will be discussed in section 8 below.

7.0 Some verbs appear in both perfective and imperfective aspects. This can occur for one or more of the following reasons.

7.1 A verb usually occurring in the perfective aspect may be used in an iterative or habitual sense, which would require the imperfective form. The following examples are all drawn from *AZ*.

nhk (*hip'il*)

Perfective:

אבל מכין אותו מכת מרדות.	He is to receive stripes for contumacy. (6:8)
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Imperfective:

יש מי שאוחז מקל בידו ונשען עליו ומכה בו עד שתפנה מחשבתו.	Another carries a staff in his hand, leans on it, and strikes with it until his mind is distracted. (11:6)
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šrt (*qal*)

Perfective:

הוא שישרט על בשרו וימלא מקום השריטה כוחל.	It is cutting the skin and filling up the cut with pigment. (12:11)
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Imperfective:

כשם שהיו הגוים שורטין בבשרן על מיתיהן.	As the gentiles used to make incisions on their skin for their dead. (12:13)
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šrp (*qal*)

Perfective:

ושורפין את כל שללם עם המדינה.	One must burn all its booty together with the town. (4:6)
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Imperfective:

לא שהוא שורפו למולך בדרך ששורפין בניהם ובנותיהם לע"ז אחרת.	He would not burn (modal perfective) him for Molek, as they used to burn (past imperfective) their children for other idols. (6:3)
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bw' (*hip'il*)

Perfective:

מביא חטאת קבועה.	He must bring a sin-offering. (3:1)
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Imperfective:

כל שאתה מביא מע"ז. Everything you get from an idol.
(7:9)

7.2 The perfective form may be ingressive, referring to the initial moment of an action, while the imperfective form is durative, referring to the entire duration of the action.

'hz (qal)

Perfective ('to take, to take hold of'):

החובר עצמו שאחז בידו כלום . . . The charmer himself who took
hold of anything in his hand.
(11:10)

Imperfective ('to hold, to keep'):

ואחז בידו בעת שמדבר מפתח. And he holds a key in his hand
while he speaks. (11:10)

ʔh (qal)

Perfective ('to fall into error'):

בימי אנוש טעו בני אדם. In the days of Enosh the people
fell into error. (1:1)

Imperfective ('to be in error'):

ידע שכל העם טועין. He knew that all the people were
wrong. (1:3)

7.3 The perfective form may be resultative, referring to the successful completion of an action, while the imperfective form refers to the entire duration of the action.

bnh (qal)

Perfective ('to build, to rebuild'):

כונס לתוך שלו ובונה. He should withdraw into his own
(property) and rebuild. (8:5)

Imperfective ('to engage in building'):

ולא יבנה מקומות כבנין היכלות שלע"ז. One may not build structures like
the idolatrous temples. (11:1)

qnh (qal)

Perfective ('to purchase'):

ובהמה זו שקניתי מבורכת היתה ומשעה שקניתייה העשרתי. This animal which I bought was
blessed and since I bought it I
have become rich. (11:5)

Imperfective ('to engage in buying'):

ואם פירש הגוי שהוא קונה	If the gentile states that he is
אותן לע"ז אסור למכור	buying for idolatrous purposes,
לו.	one may not sell to him. (9:6)

8.0 Certain kinds of subordinate clauses always require the *yp'wl* in Maimonidean Hebrew regardless of tense and aspect. These subordinate clauses can be categorized as follows:

Telic clauses.

כדי שימצא צרכיו.	In order to satisfy his needs.
	(<i>De'ot</i> 3:3)

Result clauses.

עד שיהיה לו ראשית.	So that He has a beginning.
	(<i>Yas.</i> 1:11)

Temporal clauses with *qwdm*.

קודם שימות.	Before he died. (Introduction)
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Subjunctive clauses replacing an infinitive phrase.

צריך אדם שיכוין כל מעשיו.	One should direct all one's deeds.
	(<i>De'ot</i> 3:2)

8.1 Conditional clauses use the *p'l* form for real conditions.

אם שם על לבו.	If he thought. (<i>De'ot</i> 3:3)
אם לא עשה תשובה.	If he did not repent. (<i>Taš.</i> 1:2)
אם לא רצה המסית להסית.	If the enticer did not want to entice. (<i>AZ</i> 5:3)

The *yp'wl* form is used for unreal conditions.

ואם יעלה על הדעת.	And if it could be imagined.
	(<i>Yas.</i> 1:2)
שאם נעשה אותה בשמחה ובטובת נפש ונהגה בחכמה תמיד.	That if we would do it with joy and cheer and always meditate on it. (<i>Taš.</i> 9:1)
ואם ימשך כל אדם אחר מחשבות לבו.	If every man were to follow the thoughts of his heart. (<i>AZ</i> 2:3)

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